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ABSTRACT

The Cooperative Program in Teacher Education at New Mexico State University, now in its tenth year, is a work-study degree plan which students complete in the normal four years by attending summer sessions as well as regular semesters. Graduates enter the teaching profession with exposure to several levels of public school education. From first entry, co-op students alternate semesters between a "work phase" in classrooms (for which they receive both college credit and pay), and a "school phase" requiring enrollment in fulltime university coursework. Financial support derives from the Federal Higher Education Act plus some monies from the State of New Mexico. Wages paid during the work phases are based on a graduated scale and established financial need. As freshmen and sophomores, co-op students are placed in paraprofessional roles in elementary and junior high schools. In the junior year, they hold assistant teacher classification and are assigned according to their preparations. Senior co-ops become co-teachers with broad responsibilities for teaching. A recent comprehensive comparison with a regular teacher preparation program revealed the co-op approach superior in almost all dimensions which seem representative of the quality being sought in America's classrooms. (Information on personnel, budget, evaluation, and contributions is included in this report.) (Author/RC)

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Comprehensive Explanation of the Cooperative Program in Teacher Education

New Mexico State University

Why not be more practical in teacher education with students having on-the-job experience every year during their undergraduate preparation? Why not place them in varied classrooms at different educational levels where they could learn about the real world of teaching from several public school supervisors? Why not be more selective about who is admitted to teacher education programs in the first place and who graduates from them? Could not such an experimental approach through a specialized program have significant impact on traditional pre-service programming? The answer is "yes" and it has happened at New Mexico State University. All these ideas have been tested in the Cooperative Program in Teacher Education and it has passed the test.

The Co-op Program, now in its tenth year at NMSU, is a work-study degree plan which students complete in the normal four years by attending summer sessions as well as regular semesters. It is unique in the country in that its graduates are considered experienced beginners because of their full-time involvement during four semester-long work experiences in public school classrooms.

Successful applicants must demonstrate financial need to qualify for Federal support since 80 percent of the funding derives from the Higher Education Act through its work-study provisions. More important to success, however, are other selection criteria which the evaluation committee annually takes into account.

A typical co-op student accumulated at least a "B" average while in high school, achieved average or above ACT entrance scores, presented highly favorable recommendations from professionals in his or her high school. In addition, the successful entrant submitted a writing sample to demonstrate verbal proficiency along with a statement of commitment to teaching as a career. The co-op student typically comes from a family having more than two children and earning less than $10,000.

About 40 new co-ops enter annually and all freshmen spend a semester working as paraprofessionals in elementary schools of Las Cruces, New Mexico, regardless of

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teaching major. Half of each group does so during the fall semester, the other half during the spring. When not on work phase, co-ops are enrolled in academic coursework on campus.

Co-ops receive two semester hours credit for field experience during each work phase, the evaluation of which reflects the quality of their on-the-job performance. During this phase, co-ops also enroll in a two-credit education seminar one afternoon per week. They may take one additional course of any nature so long as it does not conflict in schedule with their work assignment.

The second level experience is patterned much the same as the freshman year except that sophomores serve as paraprofessionals in junior high schools. Secondary education majors are placed according to their subject-matter specialization; elementary majors find placements in any of the curricular areas found in elementary schools, such as language arts and social studies.

Junior and senior co-ops are placed according to levels of preparation--elementary or secondary--and subject-matter specialization. Juniors are classified as assistant teachers and must organize and teach at least one complete unit of instruction. Most go beyond this minimum. Seniors serve as co-teachers. As such they engage in much collaborative decision-making in the classroom and exercise considerable autonomy over protracted periods of time.

In the study phases, these students concentrate on general education and certification endorsement areas as well as the remainder and elective portions of their professional education coursework (eight credits). Of the necessary 24 credits in professional education, 16 are earned through seminars and field experiences during the four work phases. Co-ops do not enroll in any of the professional education coursework required of regular students in the College.

Objectives. These position statements represent programmatic thrusts:

1. Teacher education should abound with talented practitioners. Therefore, preparatory programs should attract and select talented prospective teachers. This attitude is relevant now more than ever before; room should be made only for the

best in terms of potential and preparation.

2. Extensive and early participation in practical situations should be balanced with on-campus theoretical orientations. Consequently, this program provides the equivalent of two years of experience in schools during which enrollees engage in correlative seminars to help them interpret and control their experience.

3. Preparation for teaching ought to include intensive participation in the field as early as possible to enable students to test their commitment to teaching and concurrently to foster the institution's efforts in selective-retention. Consequently, co-op students are assigned in the freshman year to full-time involvement in public school settings.

4. Teacher education candidates should experience realities of the profession at multiple levels within the public school system under the supervision of more than one teacher model. Therefore, co-ops are assigned to both elementary and secondary school situations in the early years and are placed under the direct classroom supervision of at least four different teachers during their undergraduate years.

In addition, students in financial need have the opportunity to obtain a college degree who might not otherwise have been able to seek higher education. The money obtained from this program is earned and, therefore, keeps borrowed funds at a minimum.

Some academically able students who do not qualify for financial assistance opt to enroll as co-ops but receive no remuneration for services rendered during work phases. These students are classified as private-contract co-ops and abide by all program policies, including summer school attendance.

Personnel. Each seminar is conducted by a full-time professor who also observes the co-ops under his or her supervision while they are on work phase. The professor is assisted by a graduate student in education, usually a doctoral candidate with considerable teaching experience. The director of the program is Associate Dean of the College assisted by an executive secretary who works mainly with recruitment and the extensive monthly payroll.

Budget. Co-ops are paid from Title 1-C of the Higher Education Act at the

following hourly rates: freshmen--$2.15; sophomores--$2.25; juniors--$2.40; and seniors--$2.75. During the four years, a co-op can earn approximately $5,500. Federal monies for this program amount to $151,000 annually. The State of New Mexico provides $39,000. These funds are spent entirely on student salaries. The University provides all salaries to the professionals and support staff in the program. Loans and grants typically augment salaries earned enabling students to pay tuition and fees as are required.

Evaluation. From 265 selected applicants up to 1971, co-op graduates totaled 121 by Summer 1975. Approximately 30 more will complete the program at the end of the current academic year and 140 additional selectees from 1972 to the present are now enrolled. Holding power in the Co-op Program is about ten percent better than the regular program in teacher education and approximately 20 percent better than the University at large.

Highest attrition within the program has been caused by students who realized that teaching had not been a wise choice. Thus the profession was spared the possibility of their entering into teaching with neither enthusiasm nor commitment. Marriage has been the second highest cause of attrition.

A comparative study of the Co-op Program with the regular program at NMSU was recently concluded.[1] Even before completion of this study, the regular program was altered significantly to incorporate many of the compelling features of the Co-op Program, such as smaller university classes, freshman-level exposure to public school classrooms and youth, and greater emphasis on student selectivity from start to finish. The regular program contrasted in this study was the old NMSU model since the research focused on graduates of each. The new regular program has not yet yielded graduates. The former one was typical of many preparatory programs nationwide--

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[1]Mary Joe Clendenin, "The Comparative Effectiveness of the Cooperative Program and the Regular Program in Teacher Education at New Mexico State University", (unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, New Mexico State University, 1975).

class sections enrolling over 200 students in introductory education courses at the freshmen level, similar sections of teacher competency training at the sophomore level, appreciably little field exposure to the real world of teaching. Laboratory experiences under the old regular program were concentrated almost wholly in a senior block which included eight weeks of full-time student teaching.

When compared with the former regular students, the co-ops entered NMSU on the average with slightly over four standard score points higher on the ACT, earned a high school grade-point average about a half a letter grade higher, scored significantly better on standardized tests of written expression when they were seniors, and ranked lower on the Gough-Sanford Rigidity Scale as freshmen and again as seniors.

Interviews with 45 public school supervising teachers who had worked equally in time and numbers with both student teachers and junior/senior level co-ops revealed high praise for the Co-op Program from all. Of these supervisors, 43 percent had no criticism of the Co-op students with whom they had worked while all had something critical to report about regular student teachers. These interviewees found more positive attitudes toward teaching among the co-ops, felt the length of their exposure to actual classroom experiences more commendable, and noted the desirability of undergraduates in teacher education being systematically placed with a variety of teaching models.

In questionnaire results from both sets of graduates, about 75 percent of the regular students reported that their laboratory experiences had been too short. None of the co-ops reported such an opinion. With regard to theory, co-ops were likewise more positive. They found coursework in professional education relevant to them, while regular student teachers were less complimentary. All in all, the co-op graduates reported a higher self-perception with regard to their preparation to teach. They felt especially adept in the use of media and expressed more confidence about controlling classroom behavior than did their counterparts from the regular program.

The Co-op Program did not emerge superior in every dimension. Both groups of graduates reported equal satisfaction with teaching, for example. Both tended to be

equal in furthering their education through graduate study. A higher percentage of supervising teachers of both regular and co-op students felt supervision was better in the regular program. On balance, however, this evaluation appeared to bare out what has long been an informal assessment locally-it is difficult to equal or exceed the Co-op Program in quality.

Contributions. The Co-op Program has been instrumental in testing the efficacy of such seeming imperatives as early and extensive practical participation, multiple-level experience under the supervision of several teacher models, and emphasis on screening and selection of teacher candidates before their entry into a preparatory program and throughout its duration. Evidence resulting from the Co-op Program adds credence to these thrusts in a highly significant way. The current epoch particularly commends emphasis on greater selectivity in the profession.

This program has contributed much insight in its own right as a model to follow. It has also successfully influenced changes in the regular program in teacher education at NMSU in a manner which seems quite generalizable. The Co-op Program which constitutes ten percent of the enrollment in the College of Education at NMSU has influenced what is now being offered the other 90 percent, although the co-ops continue to receive more extensive and intensive preparation.

Earn/learn approaches are vanguards in higher education. Cooperative education is not new to many fields. Teacher preparation is now a permanent feature of cooperative education at NMSU, along with such other fields as engineering, business, and social welfare. And why not? It seems incredible that such a sound approach to career preparation has been so long in coming to the mother of all professions.

Donald G. Ferguson
Director, Cooperative Program in
Teacher Education

Summary: Cooperative Program in Teacher Education

New Mexico State University

The Cooperative Program in Teacher Education, an innovation at New Mexico State University in 1965, today is a well-developed, four-year earn/learn experience. Its graduates enter the profession with exposure to several levels of public school education coupled with an intensive selective-retention process.

Selectees typically come from families of more than four members, whose annual income is less than $10,000. They usually graduate from high school with at least a "B" average and score above average on the ACT. Writing samples required with applications demonstrate verbal proficiency and also affirm personal commitment to teaching.

Summer school attendance is mandatory for graduation in four years, since students begin field practice as freshmen. From first entry, co-ops alternate semesters between a "work phase" in classrooms (for which they receive both college credit and pay), and a "school phase" requiring enrollment in fulltime university coursework. Financial support derives from the Federal Higher Education Act plus some monies from the State of New Mexico. Wages during work phases are based on a graduated scale and established financial need.

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